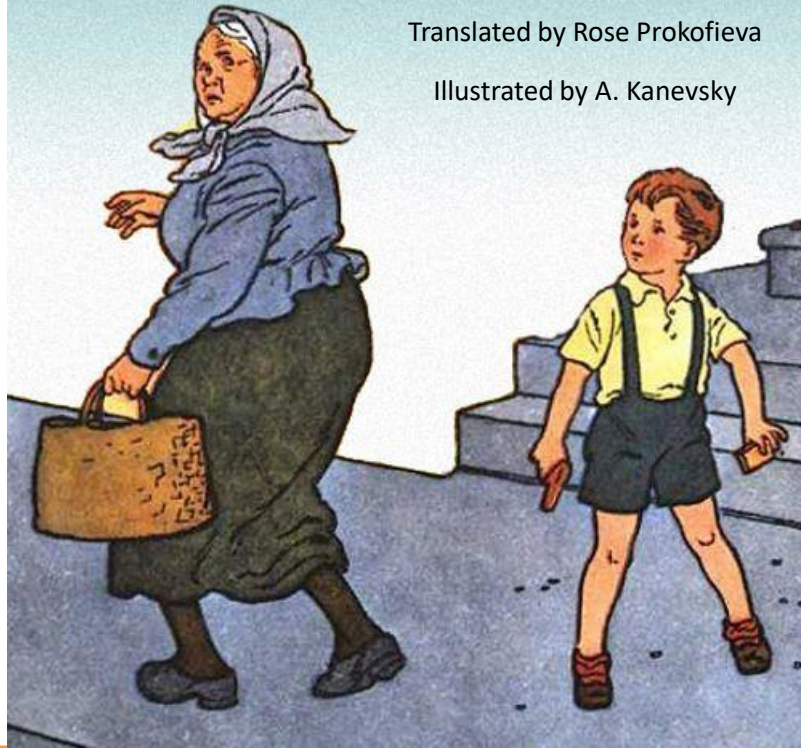


N. Nosov

The Pistol

Translated by Rose Prokofieva

Illustrated by A. Kanevsky





For a long time, Sasha had been trying to persuade his mother to buy him a toy pistol, one of those pistols that shoot caps.

"I'm not going to let you have a pistol like that," his mother said. "It's dangerous."

"No, it isn't, Mummy," Sasha protested. "If it shot bullets, it would be dangerous, but you can't kill anyone with caps."

"You may hurt somebody or knock your eye out."

"I'll shut my eyes when I shoot."

"No. I won't have it. There's no end of trouble with those toy pistols. They're not safe. You may frighten someone with it," said his mother.

And that was the end of it as far as she was concerned.

Now, Sasha had two older sisters, Marina and Ira. So, he went to them and begged for a pistol.

"I want one so badly. I promise to do anything you tell me to if you buy me one."

"Oh, Sasha," said Marina. "You're a sly little thing! When you want something you're as sweet as pie, but as soon as Mother goes out you make a nuisance of yourself."

"I won't any more, honest I won't. I'll be ever so good."



"All right," said Ira. "Marina and I will think it over. If you promise faithfully to be good, we might buy you a pistol."

"I promise. I'll be as good as gold. You'll see!"

The next day Sasha's sisters went out and bought him a pistol and a whole box of caps.

When Sasha saw the shiny black pistol and the box of caps he jumped for joy and ran around the room hugging it to him in great excitement.

"Oh, my darling pistol. How I love you!"

Then he scratched his name on the handle and started shooting. Before long the whole room was blue with smoke.

"Oh, do stop it for goodness' sake," said Ira. "I jump every time it goes off."

"Coward," said Sasha. "All girls are cowards."

"We'll take it away from you if you call us names," said Marina.

"All right, I'll go outside and frighten the boys with it," said Sasha.

He went into the back yard but there were no boys about. So, he ran out on to the street and it is here that our story really begins. As Sasha stepped out of his back yard, he saw an old woman coming down the street. He waited until she came quite close and then he fired. Bang! The old woman jumped and gave a little scream.

"Oh dear, I did get a fright!" Then she turned and saw Sasha.

"So it was you who fired? You bad boy!"



Sasha was frightened. "Oh, oh! What shall I do? She's gone to the militia to complain."

He ran home, shaking with fright.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Ira as he ran in panting.

"You look as if a wolf had been chasing you. What have you done now?"

"Er ... nothing!"

"Don't tell lies. I can see you've been up to mischief." "I haven't done anything. It's just.... The pistol went off and she took fright."

"Who took fright?"

"The old woman who was walking down the street." "Why did you fire?"

"I don't know. I just saw her coming and I thought it would be fun to fire. So I pulled the trigger."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing. She went to the militia to complain."

"There, you see. You promised to behave and now look what you've done!"

"How was I to know she'd be such a scary old thing?"

After a while he calmed down a little and brightened up.

"The old woman must have been trying to frighten me."



"Oh dear, I did get a fright!" Then she turned and saw Sasha.

"So it was you who fired? You bad boy!"

"It wasn't me," said Sasha, hiding the pistol behind his back.

"Now then, young man, you needn't tell lies. I saw you. I'm going to report you to the militia for this."

She shook her finger at him, crossed the street and disappeared round the corner.

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"Nothing. She went to the militia to complain."

"There, you see. You promised to behave and now look what you've done!"

"How was I to know she'd be such a scary old thing?"

"You wait, the militiaman will come after you. He'll give you what for!"

"How will he find me? He doesn't know where I live. He doesn't even know my name."

"Don't worry. He'll find you. The militia knows everything."

Sasha sat home for a whole hour looking out of the window every few minutes to see if the militiaman was coming. But no one came. After a while he calmed down a little and brightened up.

"The old woman must have been trying to frighten me."

He put his hand in his pocket to pull out his beloved pistol, but the pistol was gone. The box of caps was there, but no pistol. He tried the other pocket, but it was empty. He searched all over the room. He looked under the tables and under the sofa, but there was no sign of it. Sasha wept with mortification.



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"I hardly had it at all," he sobbed. "Such a lovely pistol. And now it's gone."

"Perhaps you left it in the yard?" suggested Ira.

"I must have dropped it by the gate," said Sasha. "I'll go and see."

He ran outside on to the street, but there was no sign of the pistol.

"Of course, someone picked it up," he thought. Just then a militiaman came round the corner and made straight for their house.

"He's coming for me! The old woman must have complained after all," thought Sasha and dashed home as fast as he could.



"Out there in the street."

Marina and Ira laughed at him. "You little coward! Saw a militiaman outside and got scared. He's probably not coming this way at all."

"I don't care if he is!" said Sasha stoutly. "I'm not afraid of him."

At that moment steps were heard outside and the door-bell rang. Marina and Ira ran to open the door. Sasha poked his head into the passage and hissed after them: "Don't let him in!"

But Marina had already opened the door. Sure enough, there on the threshold stood a militiaman. The brass buttons on his uniform fairly shone. Sasha dropped on to his hands and knees and crawled under the sofa.

"Is this Apartment No. 6?" he heard the militiaman ask.

"No," said Ira. "This is No. 1, No. 6 is in the house next door. The one on the right."

"Thanks," said the militiaman.

Sasha heaved a sigh of relief and was about to climb out from under the sofa when the militiaman asked:

"By the way, is there a boy called Sasha in this flat?"

"Yes," said Ira.

"He's the one I want," said the militiaman and walked straight into the room.

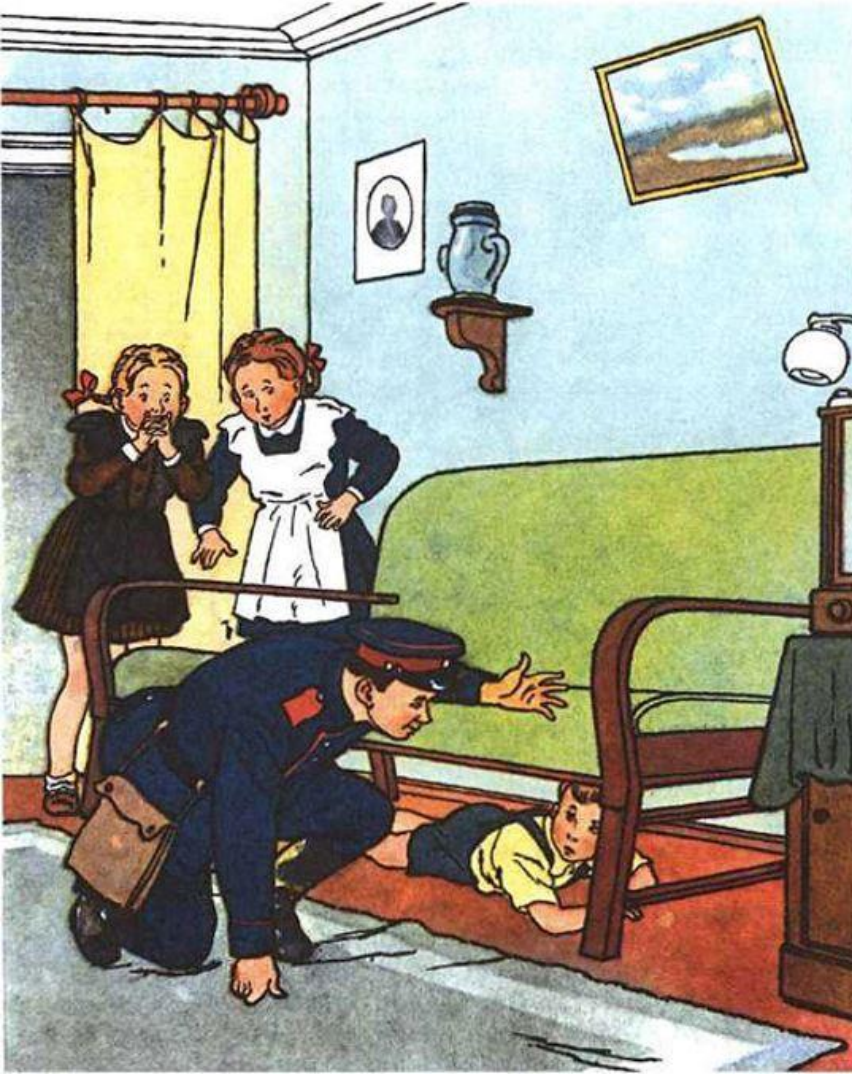
"Well, did you find it?" asked his sisters.

"Shh!" hissed Sasha. "A militiaman is coming."

"A militiaman?"

"Yes, he's coming here."

"Where did you see him?"



When the girls came in they saw that Sasha had disappeared. Marina peeped under the sofa but Sasha shook his head violently and signed to her not to give him away.

"Well, and where is that Sasha of yours?" asked the militiaman.

By this time the girls were a little frightened too and they didn't know what to say.

Finally, Marina said: "He ... er, he isn't home just now. He ... er, he went out to play."

"What do you want him for?" asked Ira. "Do you know anything about him?"

"I know all sorts of things," said the militiaman. "I know that his name is Sasha. I also know that he had a brand-new toy pistol and that now he hasn't got it."

"He knows everything!" thought Sasha in horror.

He was so nervous that his nose began to itch and before he could stop himself, he sneezed.

"Who's that?" asked the militiaman in surprise.

"That's our dog," Marina said hastily.

"What is he doing under the sofa?"

"Oh, he always sleeps under the sofa," Marina went on.



"Indeed? And what is his name?"

"Er ... Bobik," said Marina, turning red as a beet-root.

"Bobik! Bobik! Hallo there, Bobik!" called the militiaman and whistled. "Why doesn't he come out, I wonder?" He whistled again. "Doesn't want to. Funny dog. What breed did you say he was?"

"Er ... he's ... er...." Marina couldn't for the life of her remember the name of a single breed. "He's a ... what do you call it. A very good breed ... , Oh, yes, a Doberman pinscher."

"That's a fine breed," said the militiaman with a broad smile. "I know that breed very well. They have long hair all over their faces."

He bent down and peered under the sofa. Sasha stared back at him, his eyes round with fright. The militiaman whistled again, this time with amazement.

"So that's your Doberman pinscher! Hey there, young man, what are you doing under the sofa? Come out. You're caught anyway."

"I shan't come out," cried Sasha.

"Why not?"

"Because you'll take me to the militia station."

"What for?"

"For that old woman."

"What old woman?"

"The one I frightened with my pistol."

The militiaman raised his eyebrows. "Whatever is he talking about?"

"He was outside playing with his pistol and an old woman was passing just as he fired and she took fright," Ira explained.

"This must be his property then?" said the militiaman, producing a shiny new pistol from his pocket.

"That's his!" said Ira. "Marina and I bought it for him and he lost it. Where did you find it?"

"In the back yard near your door. Now what do you mean by frightening old women with a pistol, young man?" said the militiaman, bending down to Sasha who was still crouching under the sofa.

"I didn't mean to."

"You're not telling the truth. I can see by your eyes. If you tell me the truth, I'll give you back your pistol."

"And you won't take me to the militia station?"

"No."

"I didn't mean to scare her. I only wanted to see whether she would be scared or not."

"Now that isn't nice at all, young man. I really ought to lock you up for that, but since I promised, I won't. But if I catch you doing anything like that again.... Come now, get out from under there and I'll give you your pistol."

"No, I'll come out when you've gone."

"You are a funny one," laughed the militiaman. "All right, I'm going."

He laid the pistol on the table and went out. Marina showed him to the door. Sasha climbed out from under the sofa, snatched up his beloved pistol and hugged it.

"Hurrah, my dear darling pistol. So you've come back to me after all. But how did the militiaman know my name, I wonder?"

"You wrote it yourself on the handle," said Ira.

Just then Marina came back. She pounced on Sasha at once.

"You naughty boy! When I think of all the lies I had to tell that militiaman because of you I could nearly die with shame. The next time you get into a scrape like that, don't expect me to protect you."

"I shan't get into any more scrapes," said Sasha. "I'll never frighten anyone again."